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On Here, Fear, and Gear

Skills and Professional Development



“Here”

If you are a regular reader of this column, you probably know that I am a runner. I’m not the world’s best runner, but I enjoy it and consistently train to get better. Unfortunately, over the past few years, I have been plagued with injuries as a result of over training, not taking better care of my body, and repeated collisions with my 95-pound dog. After recovering from each injury, part of me thinks that I can just pick up right from where I left off. Unfortunately, for this aging athlete, that is no longer the case. Each time I get injured, I have to physically and mentally start from scratch. “Here” is where I am presently, not where I was or where I want to be.

Every journey starts in this moment. Too often, we want to start our journey somewhere else. The truth is that we can only be where we are based on our previous experiences. Wasting time and energy thinking about what we could have done differently is useless. It’s a far better use of your time and energy to start thinking about where we want to go from “here” in the future.

It’s like a sunk cost in economics. No matter how much effort you have exerted in the past, it can never be recovered. As such, it’s pointless to dwell on it. Once we accept who we are as leaders, we can create a pathway to a new reality.

“Fear”

Fear can do one of two things for us: Propel us forward or stop us in our tracks. It’s important to remember that fear is simply an emotion. It can do nothing to us, unless we give it the power to. When we feed our fears, it can prevent us from achieving the things we want to do in our lives. By addressing our fear head on, we can render it meaningless.

When I was training for my first half marathon, I would have been lying if I said I wasn't afraid. However, having fears and giving in to them are two different things. As I began my third week of training, I was struggling. There was a short two-mile run that took everything out of me. My first cross-training session of the week got off to a bad start and I had to put it off until the evening. I remember struggling to get through that workout, and wondering what I was doing. Not only had I signed up for my first half marathon, but I signed up for my second, third, fourth, fifth, and was contemplating a sixth over the course of six months. Not to mention additionally signing up for a couple of 10Ks and a five miler. What made me think I could do that?

Doubt began to set in. Sometimes the doubt was debilitating. I committed to taking my time and training in baby steps, one day at a time, and let the successes of each step along the way propel me toward my goal. Eventually, I had successfully run that first half marathon. One year later, I had successfully run 14 more. If I let had let fear interrupt me, I would still be on the sidelines with an unmet goal.

“Gear”

One day as I started my training run, it hit me that having the right gear makes all the difference in the world. Beyond shoes and my sports bra, I'd never really considered the importance of something like the pants I run in and how they might make a difference in my performance.

As leaders, our gear is not our athletic equipment, but rather our tools and our resources. It may be academic courses, an understanding mentor, or simply a variety of experiences that challenge us to grow into our capabilities. It's important to find out what we need in order to encounter each new test. We cannot get stuck in the mindset of what we needed last year, last month, or even last week. Our necessities change along with the subsequent phases of our own growth.

Being a good leader is about being constantly self-aware and willing to make adjustments to areas of improvement. By accepting where we are in the moment, keeping an eye open for opportunities to move past our fears, and making the best of the resources available to us, we can all successfully tackle any obstacle we encounter, whether it's on the running trail or our office desk.

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Whitnie Wiley was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the *Lead the Way* column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.